

## **With Love, Your Stalker by Frankiebee89**

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**Summary:** Max is dreading Valentine's Day after being bullied for dating Lucas. He finds a way to make it better.

## With Love, Your Stalker

**Notes: heads up! Trigger warning: use of the N word and period-typical racism ahead. Hopefully I handled it with respect. I don't share these beliefs, but I grew up in a similar small town and witnessed many bigoted, prejudiced views. My intent was not to offend but stay true to the story. I hope you guys don't hate it!**

**let me know how you feel. Thank you for reading.**

Valentines Day is the literal worst. Max Mayfield considers spending the day at home, feigning sick, so she can avoid the red and pink streamers and heart shaped decorations all over the walls. Plus, the disgusting kissing couples and hand-holding that would likely be everywhere, surrounding her like make-out zombies and making her nauseous.

In elementary school, it wasn't so bad. Everyone had to make Valentines for everyone else, and no one felt excluded. It wasn't about romance or who was dating who at the time; it was all about candy and treats and getting presents from your friends. The mushy stuff was for grown ups, and the last thing any elementary school kid wants is to get cooties.

But now... in eighth grade, it's obvious that things are different.

Despite her only girlfriend being a telekinetic weirdo living in a cabin in the middle of the woods, Max manages to hear the gossip. She repeats it back to El, because she would /die/ if the guys knew she paid attention to this kind of crap. And El is a good listener, since her vocabulary is mostly "Mike," "promise," and "Eggo."

After the Snow Ball, Hawkins Middle was buzzing. Who was the girl Mike Wheeler danced with? Was Dustin Henderson aware of how big of a dork he was (dancing with a high school girl did little to salvage The Hair Situation, as they'd come to call it)? And were Lucas Sinclair and Max Mayfield going together?

She'd let herself get caught up in the moment, swaying together under the sparkling disco ball with the rest of their classmates. Max

had let herself smile, let herself actually enjoy the cheesy dance, and let herself /kiss/ Lucas in front of everyone. The shocked, goofy grin on his face was totally worth it, but the repercussions Monday morning made her want to throw herself into the Upside Down all over again.

"Is it true?" Stacey H asked during PE. Max, who wasn't used to girls - or anyone, really, other than the guys - talking to her at school. She glanced around before meeting the tall blonde's gaze, just to make sure she was actually talking to /her./

"Is what true?" Max asked. She crossed her arms over her chest, feeling the tough-girl mask slide over her features.

"That you like, made out with Lucas Sinclair at the dance," Stacey said. The way she said it - the way the other girls stalled their bouncing basketballs, the way the echoing gymnasium fell into an almost silence... the way that everyone was /looking/ at her, waiting for an answer. Max felt her traitorous cheeks turn scarlet. But she wouldn't let them rattle her.

"Yeah, so?" She dribbled her ball and aside from some surprised gasps and titters, it was the only sound. Where was the teacher? Wasn't this bullying?

"I just can't believe you'd let a /nigger/ kiss you."

Max felt her breath catch in her chest. She'd never used that word in her life - she'd never really even heard it, outside of the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. But she knew that it was wrong, that Stacey was the lowest scum for using it, that there was nothing wrong g with Lucas because his skin was darker than her's -

"I mean, we're supposed to stick to our own kind. And Midnight -"

That was all the girl got out, because Max's fist was colliding with her nose and then there was blood everywhere, all over the vinyl floor and Stacey's gym uniform, and Max had to go to the office and got suspended.

The next few weeks had sucked. Lucas thought they should "lay low,"

make it easier on themselves. Not stir the pot. Naturally, Max disagreed and called him stupid. She wouldn't hide who she cared about (she /almost/ said loved, but had kept herself in check) from anyone. Especially the stuck-up bitches at school.

But the bullying didn't stop. And it wasn't just Max getting shit, it was Lucas, and eventually it bled out to the others, too. The rumors going around school were disgusting - stories of weekend orgies where Max was sleeping with /all/ of them, that she'd had to move to Hawkins because she got kicked out of her old school for getting pregnant...

She was only thirteen, for cripe's sake! She'd only kissed one boy, and that was Lucas, and he just happened to be black! Max didn't get it. This was the /nineteen/-eighties, not the frickin' civil war era! Racism was a thing of the past. Why did it matter who she lo-cared for?!

El was very little help. As the weeks wore on, and the two bonded - first out of necessity, being the only girls in their group of friends, then because they learned they actually had quite a bit in common and bonded. El was wise in ways that Max wasn't, and Max knew a lot more than El about how the world worked. Together, they almost made up one normal person.

"I don't understand," El had said, brow furrowed as she stared deeply into Max's eyes, searching for answers. Max had signed and flopped back onto her friend's bed. "Why does his skin color mean he's /bad/?"

"It doesn't," Max said. "Dumb people think that."

"Mouth-breathers."

"Definitely."

"But... my sister has dark skin. She's not bad." El pondered this, and Max had to bite back the questions that were struggling to get out (she had a sister? Since when? Was she magical like El? And she was black?!). It's not the time - and El quickly continues her thought. "You shouldn't have punched Stacey though. That was wrong."

"Well, she shouldn't have called Lucas that word." She sees red at the memory. Max wished she could have gotten more than one solid punch in before the gym teacher broke them up.

"It'll work out, Max. It will probably be hard... it will probably take time for people to calm down. But if you love Lucas, and he loves you, then everything will be worth it."

El might have been naive but she was brilliant in a simple way. A way that made sense.

So for the past couple months, Max did things Lucas' way. She didn't "flaunt" their relationship by kissing him in the halls - even though every other couple in school got to - or hold hands in public, or invite him over for family dinner. Even /his/ family was weird about the whole thing...

"Not because they don't like you," Lucas insisted when Max brought it up.

She rolled her sea-green eyes. "No, they just don't like that I'm white."

"They're scared, Max. Something bad could happen to me - to /us/ - because of small minds here... I don't want anything to happen to you, or me, my family..." Lucas had gazed deeply into her eyes, his own coffee-brown orbs filled with pain and love and sadness and longing. "I want /you/ Max. I always will. Ok?"

How could she do anything but melt? Her knees felt weak as she forced herself to nod. Had they not been at the Palace, crowded with their classmates and already drawing stares, Max would have kissed him. For now, she settled on punching his arm and demanding a rematch at Pac Man.

And it sucked, but it was ok. Until stupid Valentine's Day. It would all be thrown in her face again - the fact that the boy she maybe loved was smart, loyal, protective, fierce... and /black./ That last little fact was enough to change the rules, make their feelings /wrong/ even though Max had never felt so deeply /right/ with anyone else.

That morning, she pulls in her customary jeans, a yellow T-shirt and

a black hoodie. Her wild copper locks are pulled back in a ponytail, and she feels bleak as she toes on her Vans and grabs her board. Billy is too distracted by whatever girl he's got plans with to look at her, let alone make any snide comments, and she's a little grateful for the bimbo.

The hallways are decorated precisely how she imagined. Stacey H and Jennifer Hayes are selling carnations to deliver from boyfriend's and girlfriends. Max can't help but crack a grin at Stacey, who visibly flinches as though she will strike again. It seems like everywhere Max looks, someone is kissing, holding hands, making "heart eyes" at each other. It's disgusting.

Dustin and Mike are waiting at her locker, both looking as thrilled as she feels. Taking a deep breath, she puts on her "I'm fine, everything is fine," face and gives them a pitying look.

"Don't start, Mayfield," Mike snaps, and she quirks an eyebrow. "You're not the only one that doesn't get to enjoy the day."

/Right,/ Max thinks. Mike and El don't even get to see each other, let alone maybe get to sneak in a hug or kiss. She actually feels kind of guilty, so lost in her own angst, that she's forgotten her friends'.

"And I'm just going to be alone forever," Dustin adds, pathetically.

"Aw, don't worry, Dustin. Harrington loves you." She knocks his hat off and even though it drives him crazy, he doesn't curse her out over it. In fact, she sees the shadow of a smile on his face.

The day passes quickly. Max is glad - lunch was a make out fest and there's only so much tongue and saliva swapping she can handle in one day. Once seventh period rolls around, Max is yawning and thinking about a giant soda at the Palace, when Jennifer Hayes breezes in with a basket of pink carnations and a big, mushy grin. The teacher huffs but waves her on, and she begins to dole out the stupid flowers.

Except, she doesn't. She sidles right up to Max's desk, in the far corner of the classroom, and plunks the basket on her desk.

"Seems like you're pretty popular," Jennifer stage-whispers. But there's only one card attached, and frowning with confusion- this has to be a sick prank - her stomach tumbles and her heart stutters.

"For MadMax. With love, your Stalker."

Her cheeks went ruby red and she felt tears well up in her eyes. Leave it to Lucas to figure out a way to make it special, just for her. She hasn't even got him anything! And here she had a basket of stupid (but incredibly touching and meaningful) flowers. The entire room was staring at her, but Max Mayfield didn't care.

Maybe she /did/ love him, after all.